VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

JULY 1999 ONE DOLLAR

Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

During the last month or so, the Department has had the good fortune to be involved in a couple of events that really go to the heart of what we're all about. In every magazine issue, you can see our mission statement and one part of that statement talks about providing opportunities for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation. Well, we've been fairly busy with this task of providing opportunities. On May 10th, we officially opened the new fish hatchery in Brookneal in a ceremony that honored Delegate A. Victor Thomas of Roanoke by recognizing the facility as the Vic Thomas Striped Bass Hatchery. Since the recent state record striped bass of nearly 50 pounds was spawned and reared at the original Brookneal facility before being stocked into Smith Mountain Lake, you can understand how important this hatchery is to our task of providing opportunities. And it was such a tremendous privilege for us to name the facility in honor of Delegate Thomas, because it recognizes that he is truly a long-time friend of the sportsmen and women of the Commonwealth.

Then just before Memorial Day weekend, we officially opened some new facilities at Briery Creek Lake in Prince Edward County. A new boat ramp and a new handicapped accessible covered fishing pier, plus two courtesy piers, will now provide additional boating and fishing access to the 845-acre lake owned by the Department. In the case of Briery Creek Lake, access means opportunity to enjoy one of the best largemouth bass fisheries in Virginia.

It's not very difficult to see that we take a lot of pride in doing the day-to-day tasks that help us fulfill our mission statement. Providing opportunities for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation is really about you heading out to Briery Creek Lake in search of a lunker largemouth or to Smith Mountain Lake with the hope of catching the next state record striped bass that had its start at the Vic Thomas Striped Bass Hatchery. We hope you enjoy participating in these opportunities as much as we enjoy providing them.

Lee Walker

David Whitehurst

Dedication and official opening of the Briery Creek Lake boat landing and fishing facility at Route 701. (Left to right) Ken Turner, Capital Outlay Project Engineer, DGIF, William L. Woodfin, Jr., Director of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Hunter R. Watson, Chairman, Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors, Larry Hart, Director of Boating, DGIF, The Honorable John Paul Woodley, Jr., Secretary of Natural Resources.

On a final note this month, I want to remind all of our recreational boaters to be just a bit more careful during the upcoming July 4th holiday weekend. We know it will be really busy on our waterways and a little extra precaution will go a long ways in keeping your boating experience both safe and pleasurable.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

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How many horses are too many? See "I'm Misty Over You" on page 23. ©Dwight Dyke

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: *A non-native to Virginia's coastal barrier islands, the Chincoteague horse is now a registered breed. Photo ©Dwight Dyke.*
Back cover: *Canvasback, photo ©Lynda Richardson.*

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

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WELCOME
TO THE TOWN OF
TROUTVILLE
CHARTERED
1956
PEPSI
Welcome to Pepsi Country
ELK RUN
STORE
PEPSI
PEPSI
ICE

at's Name

Throughout history, wildlife has played an important role in how creeks, mountains and even towns have gotten their names.

by James M. Turner

Everybody in Elk Creek, Virginia, had an idea or two about where the town got its name. Only one man knew the answer for sure. Robert Delp, who has lived in Elk Creek his entire life, laughed as he explained how settlers "Jumped an Elk on Elk Creek and called it Elk Creek and run it across the mountain and crippled it over on Cripple Creek and they called that Cripple Creek and then they ran it on over to Reed Creek and caught it in a patch of reeds and called it Reed Creek." With a straight face, he assured me, "That's the way they all got their names."

Not everyone in Elk Creek agreed with Mr. Delp. Doc Harvey, another long-time resident, warned that "Creeks are about like nicknames they give kids, sometimes they stick, and sometimes they don't." Even though Doc Harvey had heard Mr. Delp's story, he said, "I don't think it had anything to do with an elk. It may have, but I don't think so." As others in Elk Creek were quick to point out, there are no elk in the mountains of southwestern Virginia.

But in the 18th century, when explorers first entered the region, elk did roam these hills. William Byrd

Elk Creek in Grayson County is thought to have been named by early pioneers who saw elk while exploring this part of the state. On the other hand, Troutville, just north of Roanoke, takes its name from the Trout family, and not the fish. Photos ©Dwight Dyke.

©Dick Dickenson

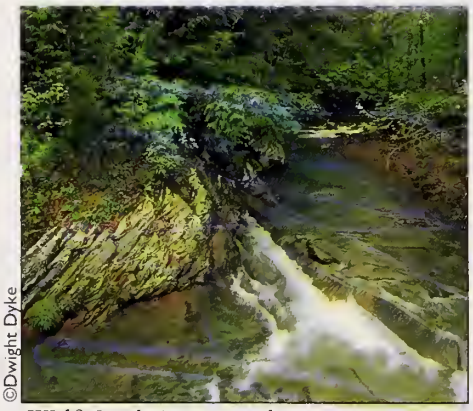
described elk as "big as a horse" and with horns that are "exceedingly large and spreading." A few decades later, settlers named Elk Creek for the animals spotted in its headwaters.

Across the colony, other pioneers did the same. Settlers encountered a range of wildlife in Virginia, including wolves, deer, buffalo, elk, and turkeys, among other animals. And many of these creatures lent their names to creeks or newly formed towns. Today, there are many small towns with names like Trout Dale, Buffalo Bend, Turkeyfork and Wolftown. On the map, these towns are mere dots. Most are just country crossroads. Yet each town represents much more. In their names are clues to our state's natural history.

The elk's smaller relative, the deer, for instance, is more abundant today than in colonial times, and this is reflected in Virginia's names. Only Deerfield, in western Augusta County, calls forth the image of white-tailed deer. Apparently deer were especially plentiful in this area, and settlers gave the name to both the valley and the town. Over the ridge, in Highland County, the mountains also suggest the abundance of deer. Buck Hill, Buck Mountain, Doe Hill, and Little Doe Hill all line the headwaters of the Bullpasture River.

Of the animals the settlers encountered none made a greater impression than the buffalo. Usually, buffalo are associated with the Great Plains. But in the 18th century the buffalo, with its shaggy head, formidable hump, and tiny eyes, lived in smaller numbers in the Blue Ridge mountains. In fact, more Virginia towns and rivers take their name from the buffalo than any other animal.

On a map, these buffalo



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Wolf Creek (top), Washington County and Buffalo River in Amherst County (right) were each named for animals that once roamed these areas, but are now only reflections of the past. Buffalo (far right) ©Dick Dickenson.

names form a line along the eastern flank of the Blue Ridge. Buffalo Station, Buffalo Gap and Buffalo Creek suggest settlers first encountered buffalo in the foothills of Amherst, Rockbridge, and Nelson counties. Further east or west, buffalo names are less common. The buffalo were rare east of the Piedmont, and the animals were no longer a novelty as settlers moved west.

Other animals the settlers depended upon for food also contributed to Virginia's landscape. When Captain Christopher Newport explored the James River in 1607, he named Turkey Island for a great flock of turkeys gathered there. Bear Wallow can be found in Tazewell County on Virginia's western border. And Trout Dale is named for the plentiful brook trout in Fox Creek and the hilly land it flows through in Grayson County.

Predators also made their impression on Virginia's settlers. The panther, though rare even in colonial times, shares its name with Panther Falls where the Pedlar River cascades down the Blue Ridge in Amherst County. The wolf was far more common than the panther, and it must have been especially troublesome in the mountains of Tazewell and Bland counties. There, five miles northwest of Burkes Garden, Wolf Pen Gap is so named because the narrow terrain was especially well suited to ensnaring wolves. Further east, Wolf Creek, Little Wolf Creek, and Wolf Pen Branch all contribute to the waters of the New River. In Madison County, Wolftown takes its name from a nearby spring. Settlers discovered it was a favorite haunt of a local pack of wolves, thus giving the spring and then the town its name.

The bobcat, perhaps Virginia's most elusive predator, evaded settlers in colonial times, too. Its name distinguishes no Virginia towns or creeks.

Noting these names that mark Virginia's landscape gives one a sense for how the region's wildlife has changed over the centuries. Names mentioning buffalo, elk and wolves point only to the memory of animals that once roamed the region. Other names including deer, beaver and turkey honor animals still inhabiting Virginia's countryside. At the start of the 20th century, however, all of these names seemed a bit out of place.

After the Civil War, as industrialization swept into Virginia's mountains, much of the region's wildlife began declining as suitable habitats disappeared. By the 1920s, Virginia's cutover forests were growing quiet. Few mature forests and little wildlife remained. Names like Deerfield or Turkeyfork, which

made sense a century before, began to seem out of place.

Had it not been for the combined efforts of the state and federal government, and the cooperation of many local game organizations, all of these names would suggest only the ghosts of animals that had once populated these forests.

Some town names are deceptive. Troutville, in Botetourt County, takes it name from the Trout family, not the fish. The same is true of Raven in Tazewell County. Its name comes from a local merchant. Surprisingly, the Peaks of Otter, and its accompanying creeks, do not take their name from the river dweller. Scores of landmarks in Scotland bear the name Otter, and the Peaks of Otter are a continuation of this tradition in America.

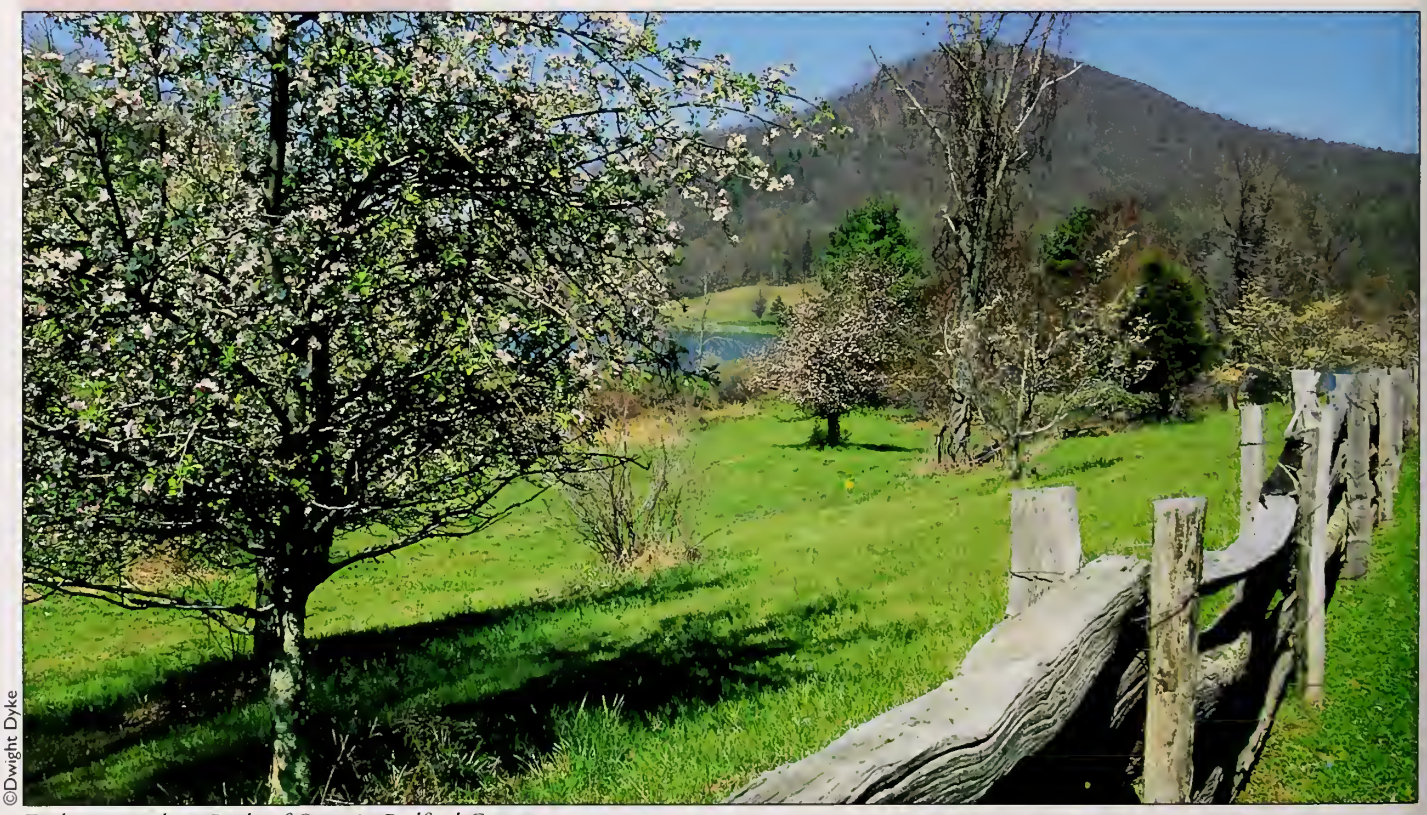
If you would like to learn more about towns and how they got their names, try reading *The Heritage of Virginia: The Story of Place Names in the Old Dominion*, by James Hagemann.

Starting in 1911, the first formal steps towards restoring Virginia's natural heritage were taken. That year, Congress passed the Weeks Act authorizing the federal government to buy up unwanted lands along the crest of the Appalachian mountains. Those lands, meant to protect the region's water supply, ultimately became the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. The Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, founded in 1916, helped the Forest Service expand the scope of its forestry programs when the two organizations signed a cooperative agreement in 1938. Though the forests were meant for watershed protection and timber sales, with the help of the Virginia Game Commission, they were managed for game habitat as well. The ensuing success encouraged many other states to follow Virginia's lead in establishing cooperative agreements with the Forest Service.

Working in tandem, the Forest Service managed the habitat, and the state worked to restock the wildlife. Soon, deer from Michigan, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania repopulated Virginia herds. Bears from the Dismal Swamp rambled across the mountains and turkeys gobbled on the ridges. Trout populations also began to show promise as the native brook trout regained its upland ranges.

Creek names may be like nicknames, and when they stick, there must be good reason. Today, thanks to the Forest Service and Game Commission (today's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries), managed wildlife programs have saved many species that nearly vanished from Virginia. Deer, turkey, beaver, rabbits, and trout are only a few of the success stories. Other animals, such as the buffalo and wolf may never roam the fields and mountains of Virginia again. But a constant reminder of their presence will always be visible in the names of the creeks, mountains and small towns, which spread across our state map like hoofprints across time. ☐

James Morton Turner is from Roanoke, Virginia, and is currently a graduate student at Princeton University, studying American history and the environment.



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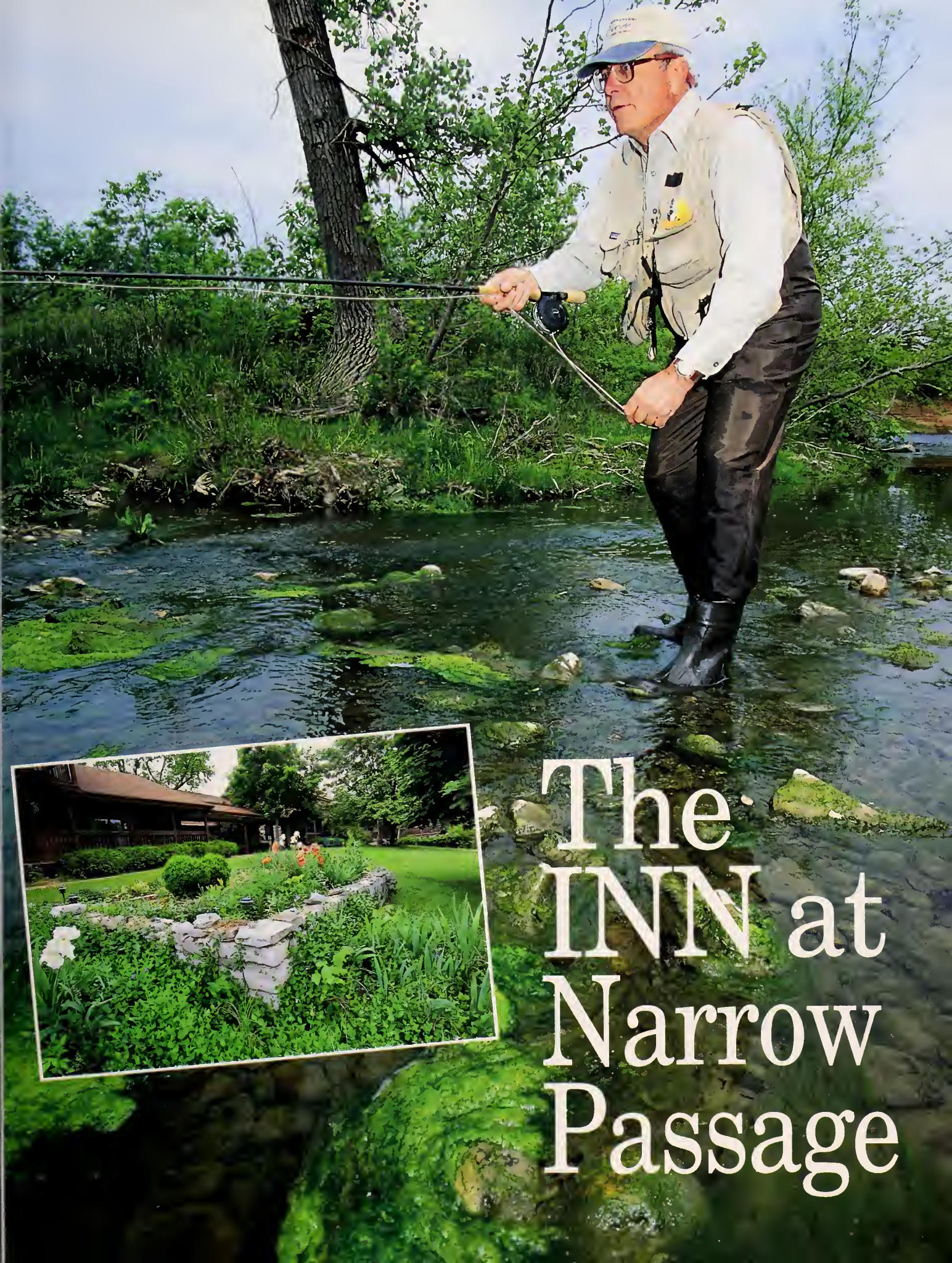
Early spring along Peaks of Otter in Bedford County.


The INN at Narrow Passage

©Dwight Dyke

Tom Jackson sat at the rough-hewn wooden table, thoughtfully rubbed his beard, and gazed out of the open window. The river and a low mountain ridge ran southwest to northeast, and beyond to the east lay the Blue Ridge. He stood, walked slowly to the other side of the old coach stop inn, hand still gently stroking his whiskers, and peered at the Great Wagon Road that ran through the valley, the Allegheny Mountains to the west. "Jed," he called to his cartographer, "make me a map of this here Shenandoah Valley."

"Yessir, General" replied Jedediah Hotchkiss smiling. Few could guess what Stonewall had in mind at any time; General Ewell called him "crazy as a March hare." But from his order for a map, it wasn't hard to figure out that his troops would be seeing action soon.

©Dwight Dyke

History, impeccable hospitality and good fishing help to pamper even the most rugged of outdoorsman.

by King Montgomery

Today, the Great Wagon Road is U.S. Route 11 and the old coach stop and inn, originally built around 1740, is the Inn at Narrow Passage. The inn, named for the creek that flows into the North Fork of the Shenandoah River not more than a hundred yards away, is located a few miles south of Woodstock, on the way to Edinburg. Just below the inn property, at the confluence of the river and the creek, you'll find a Department of Game and Inland Fisheries boating access point and parking area.

Innkeepers Ed and Ellen Markel renovated the old inn, keeping its 18th century charm and look, and now this comfortable establishment caters to weekenders, vacationers, and anglers looking for a great place to "get away from it all."

After a scenic 90-minute drive from Annandale in Northern Virginia, Elizabeth, a close friend and fishing partner, and I quickly unpacked, grabbed the fly and spin-

ning rods, crossed the sloping front lawn, and stepped into the beautiful Shenandoah River. The North Fork was running low, not surprising for the last days of summer. We stepped into the river and headed slowly downstream, casting as we went. The mossy rocks provided tenuous footing in places, but the slower-than-usual current made for comfortable wading. The water was extremely clear; aquarium like and brilliant green star grass was everywhere. Plants flourish in low clear water where sunlight can reach them all day long.

The clear, shallow water made the fish very spooky; there wasn't much between them and overhead predators. Long, accurate casts were needed with the fly or spinning rod to reach isolated clumps of vegetation, prominent rocks, fallen trees, and other fish-holding structure. These conditions call for light lines and tippets, down to 6 and 4 pound test, and some degree of wading stealth. Today, our efforts met with success. Smallmouth bass, rock bass, and fallfish came to our spinners and flies, an amazingly diverse medley from a relatively small area of the river.

The Inn at Narrow Passage is a great place to unload your civilized burdens, to experience the clear air, and the therapeutic effects of a mountain limestone river. Rooms at the inn are lovely and quite comfortable. As the warm afternoon sun began to set, we relaxed on the front porch with a glistening pitcher of cool lemonade. It's good to be spoiled now and then.

©King Montgomery

Angling guide Lou Guisto admires a smallmouth bass. The Inn at Narrow Passage (above left) sits on a low hill just above the North Fork of the Shenandoah River.

Breakfast is served at tables in the older part of the inn, where General Jackson asked for his map in 1862. We took some of everything from the delicious buffet selection and were sorely tempted for seconds. The adjoining great room, with its two fireplaces, wooden floor, and heavy ceiling beams, is much the same as it was in those turbulent years of the American Civil War. A portrait of Stonewall hangs above the old piano, presiding over the room as the original did in the early 1860s. His penetrating eyes seemed to follow you wherever you went in the room, much like they must have done in life back then.

©King Montgomery

The North Fork of the Shenandoah is an excellent river for wading. Anglers can tackle smallmouth bass, as well as rock bass and fat redbreast sunfish.

After a restful night, we were on the water again. The first rays of the rising sun peaked over Massanutten Mountain when we began fishing just below the Burnshire Dam, located on one of the loops of the river's famous Seven Bends. Several smallmouth took angling guide Lou Guisto's Sluggo-like plastic bait, and a nice one of about 16 inches shook off my popper at the net. As the morning progressed, smallmouth bass and fat redbreast sunfish attacked my Clouser deep minnow. In late morning, a number of fallfish, a large member of the minnow family, sipped dry flies like rising trout; they particularly seemed to like a #12 Goddard caddis.

Lou knows the river, and you can tell he loves it as well. He usually guides fishing clients from a comfortable raft, but the river was so low from drought we had to wade. The South Fork of the Shenandoah, just over the Massanutten, was low too, but still high enough for the raft, and Lou was taking guests there if they didn't choose to wade in the North Fork. Elizabeth and I like to wade; it brings you closer to the river and its moods. Keeps you cool in hot weather as well.

On the way back to the Inn at Narrow Passage, we stopped for lunch at the Spring House on South Main Street in Woodstock. We enjoyed our dinner there the evening before, and lunch was just as successful. Aside from the good food, friendly service, and reasonable prices, the Spring House is worth a visit just to see the tasteful, eclectic antique decor, and to read about its interesting history on the menu.

That afternoon we drove around the area a little, stopping in nearby Edinburg to visit Harry Murray's Fly Shop and Pharmacy. Where else can you pick up Advil, in-line spinners, and a few flies all in the same store. This is one-stop shopping at its best! Like Lou Guisto, Harry works closely with the Inn at Narrow Passage and he and his guides can take you smallmouth bass or trout fishing.

The Inn at Narrow Passage is great for a personal, get-away weekend, but it also accommodates small conferences and office off-site gatherings or retreats. The fully-equipped conference room is perfect for meetings and seminars. Whether you come for business or pleasure, you'll have plenty to choose from for recreation. Fishing, hiking, birding,

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A suspension bridge is just downriver from the Inn. It spans the North Fork of the Shenandoah River and is part of a pleasant walking trail along and over the river.

photography, antiquing, and chasing history are all great options, and the Inn at Narrow Passage is the perfect headquarters for your activities, just as it was for Stonewall Jackson years ago. ☐

A regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife *magazine, King Montgomery lives in Annandale, Virginia.*

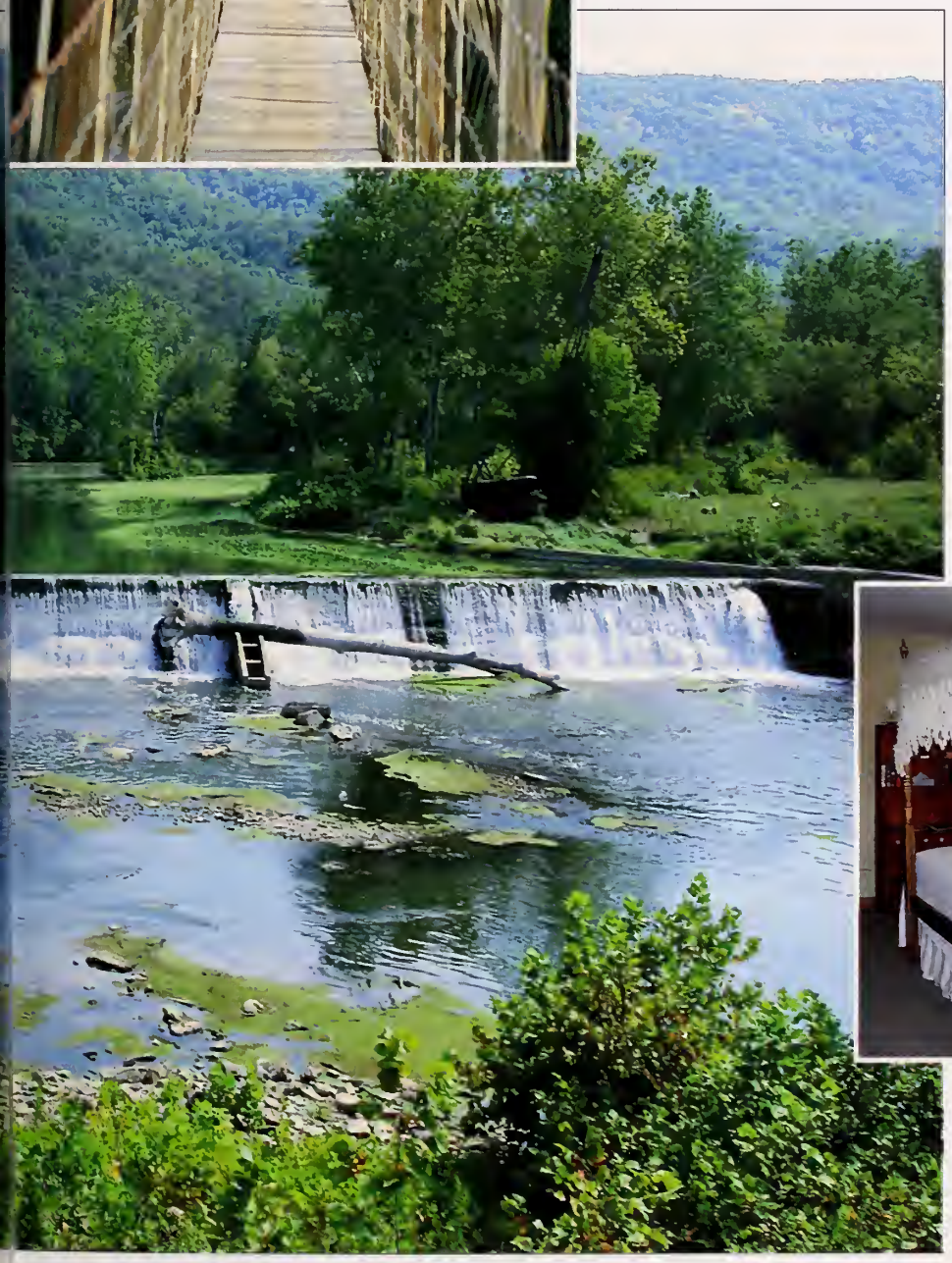
The Inn at Narrow Passage (540) 459-8000, or 1-800-459-8002 or visit their Web site at http://www.shentel.net/narrowpassageinn.

Angling guide Lou Guisto can be reached at (540) 459-2285 or e-mail bronzbck@shentel.net.

Harry Murray's Fly Shop (540) 984-4212 or visit the Web site at http://www.murrays flyshop.com.

The Spring House restaurant is at 325 S. Main Street in Woodstock, (540) 459-4755.

A good river atlas can be ordered from The Friends of The Shenandoah River (540-636-4948) or The Friends of the North Fork Shenandoah (540-459-8550).



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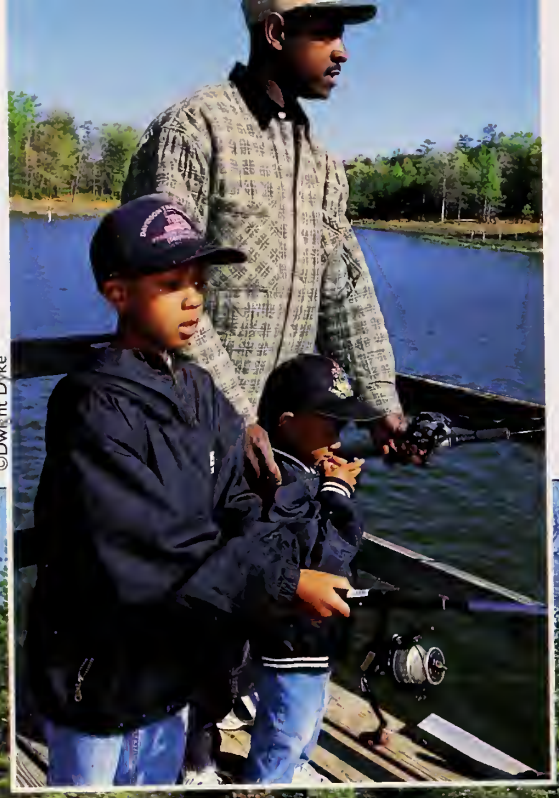
The Inn at Narrows Passage (top) has been welcoming travelers in style since the 1740s. Burnshire Dam (left), on one of the famous Seven Bends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River.

Five Star
On



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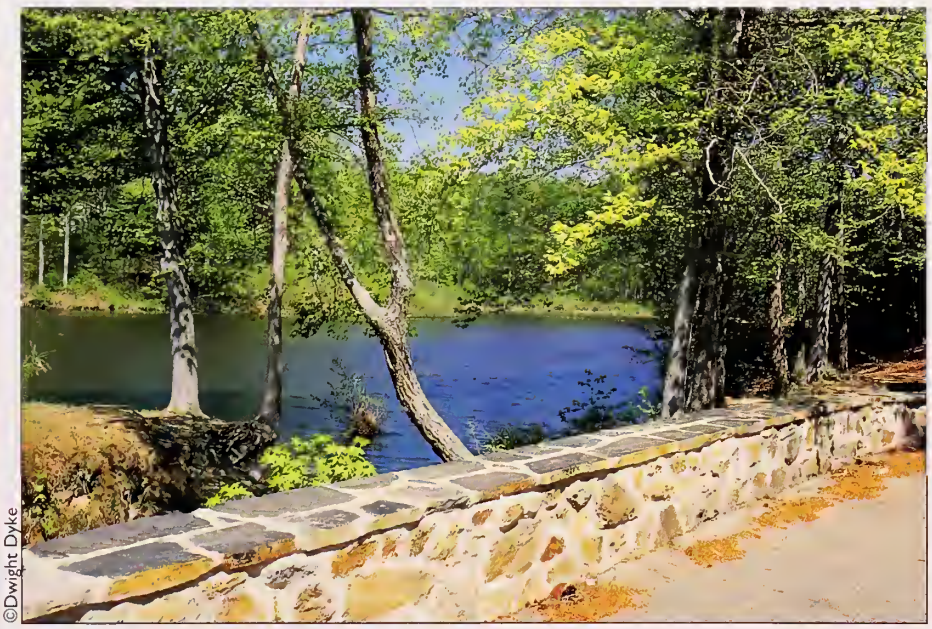
Angling Virginia's Military Reservations

Cracking the code on where to find great fishing locations is easier than you think.

by Tim Copeland

Everyone knows of Virginia's large military bases Quantico, Fort A.P. Hill and Fort Pickett. These facilities help keep our nation's armed forces trained and ready. What you may not realize is that good fishing may be found within their bounds.

These three military reservations are located in northern and central Virginia and contain several small to mid-size impoundments open to the general public. Because access to fishable waters in the northern and central portions of the state is somewhat limited, these facilities offer nearby diversity for many of Virginia's anglers.



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Beaver Pond (left) at Fort A. P. Hill offers easy access for anglers and plenty of places for big fish to hide. The scenic beauty of Travis Lake (above) at A. P. Hill is a great place to picnic or just sit back and watch the birds.

The Rules of the Game

In order to fish at Quantico, Fort A.P. Hill or Fort Pickett, there are certain rules in common that must be followed. Each requires an installation or base fishing permit as well as a valid state or county fishing license. Special regulations may also apply. Nighttime fishing is either not allowed or by arrangement only, depending on the base. Boating is allowed under Virginia state regulations, but there are specific motor regulations for each base and a permit may be required. Some areas are off-limits or are accessible intermittently. Check with the appropriate authorities for permission to fish these waters. Finally, these reservations have seen many military exercises and it is possible to find unexploded shells or duds anywhere. Finders **SHOULD NOT** disturb the dud but **SHOULD** mark its location and report it to the appropriate authorities. Please follow these rules; they are as much for your protection as for the regulation and management of the resource.

Different opportunities can be found at each reservation. There are also specific rules that apply only at a particular installation. Please become familiar with these before fishing.

Quantico U. S. Marine Corps Reservation

Aquatic resources are abundant and diverse at Quantico and include small ponds, large reservoirs and stocked trout streams. Probably the best known and definitely the largest is Lunga Reservoir, a 477-acre impoundment with a typical warmwater fish community. Largemouth bass, black crappie, bluegill and redear sunfish are present and excellent populations of channel catfish and white perch offer extra weight for the stringer. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) has assisted by stocking walleye in efforts to establish a naturally reproducing population. Department of Defense (DOD) personnel constructed an artificial gravel and stone spawning reef to facilitate this endeavor. Other reservoirs on base include Breckinridge, a 47-acre underutilized lake with primitive access and a good bass population. Smith, a 157-acre lake shared with Stafford County, was just expanded and new access has been provided by DOD. Fishing in 1999 and 2000 should be exciting! Quantico has six other lakes, all under 10 acres, and boasts 4.7 miles of put-and-take stocked trout water. Many sections of Chopawamsic Creek are stocked by the base with VDGIF fish through a cooperative agreement (check the trout guide for

Continued on page 21.

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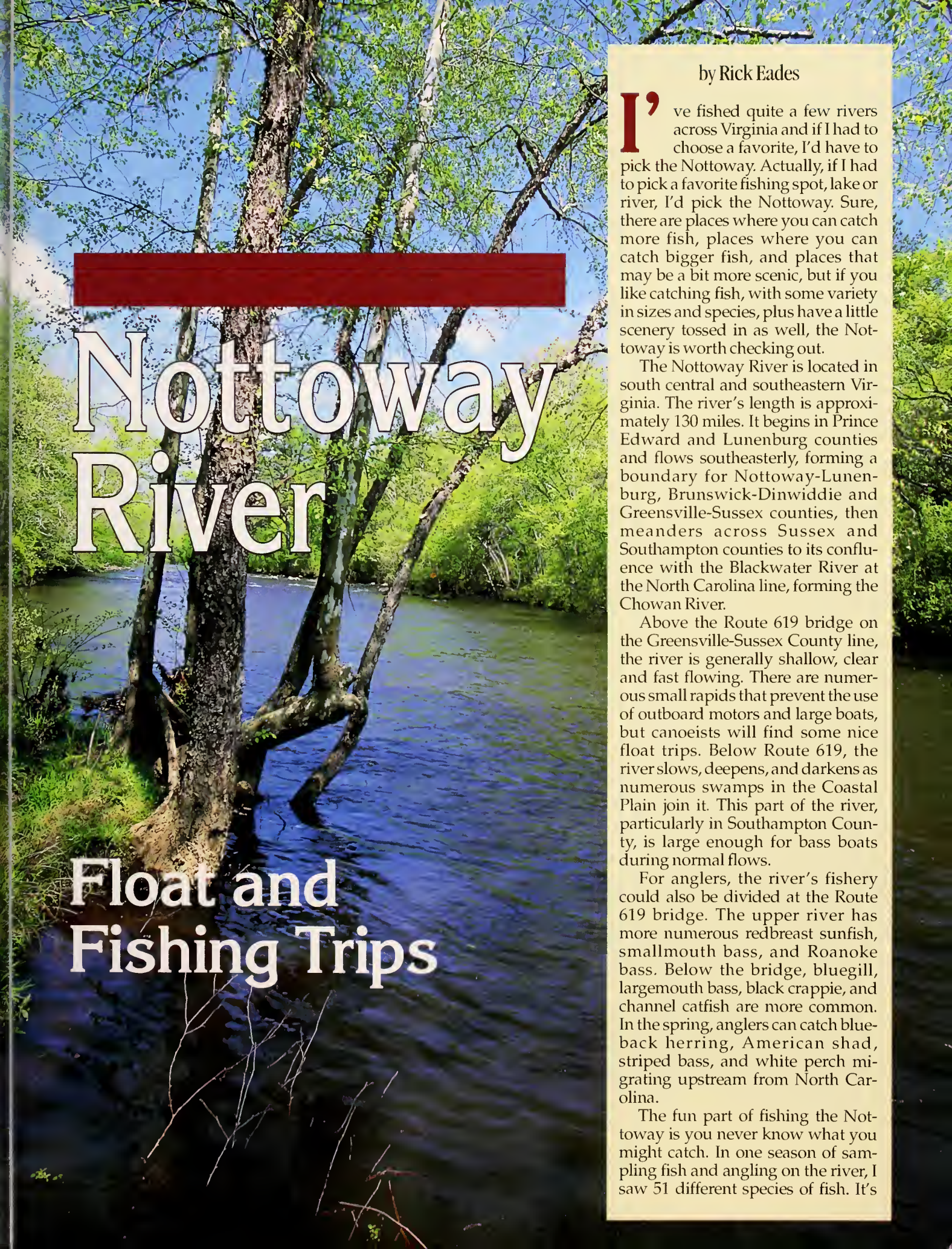
Quantico U.S. Marine Corps Reservation offers numerous lakes, a 477-acre reservoir, fishing along a tidal river, and even a put-and-take stocked trout fishery on Chopawamsic Creek.



Nottoway River

Float and Fishing Trips

by Rick Eades

I've fished quite a few rivers across Virginia and if I had to choose a favorite, I'd have to pick the Nottoway. Actually, if I had to pick a favorite fishing spot, lake or river, I'd pick the Nottoway. Sure, there are places where you can catch more fish, places where you can catch bigger fish, and places that may be a bit more scenic, but if you like catching fish, with some variety in sizes and species, plus have a little scenery tossed in as well, the Nottoway is worth checking out.

The Nottoway River is located in south central and southeastern Virginia. The river's length is approximately 130 miles. It begins in Prince Edward and Lunenburg counties and flows southeasterly, forming a boundary for Nottoway-Lunenburg, Brunswick-Dinwiddie and Greensville-Sussex counties, then meanders across Sussex and Southampton counties to its confluence with the Blackwater River at the North Carolina line, forming the Chowan River.

Above the Route 619 bridge on the Greensville-Sussex County line, the river is generally shallow, clear and fast flowing. There are numerous small rapids that prevent the use of outboard motors and large boats, but canoeists will find some nice float trips. Below Route 619, the river slows, deepens, and darkens as numerous swamps in the Coastal Plain join it. This part of the river, particularly in Southampton County, is large enough for bass boats during normal flows.

For anglers, the river's fishery could also be divided at the Route 619 bridge. The upper river has more numerous redbreast sunfish, smallmouth bass, and Roanoke bass. Below the bridge, bluegill, largemouth bass, black crappie, and channel catfish are more common. In the spring, anglers can catch blueback herring, American shad, striped bass, and white perch migrating upstream from North Carolina.

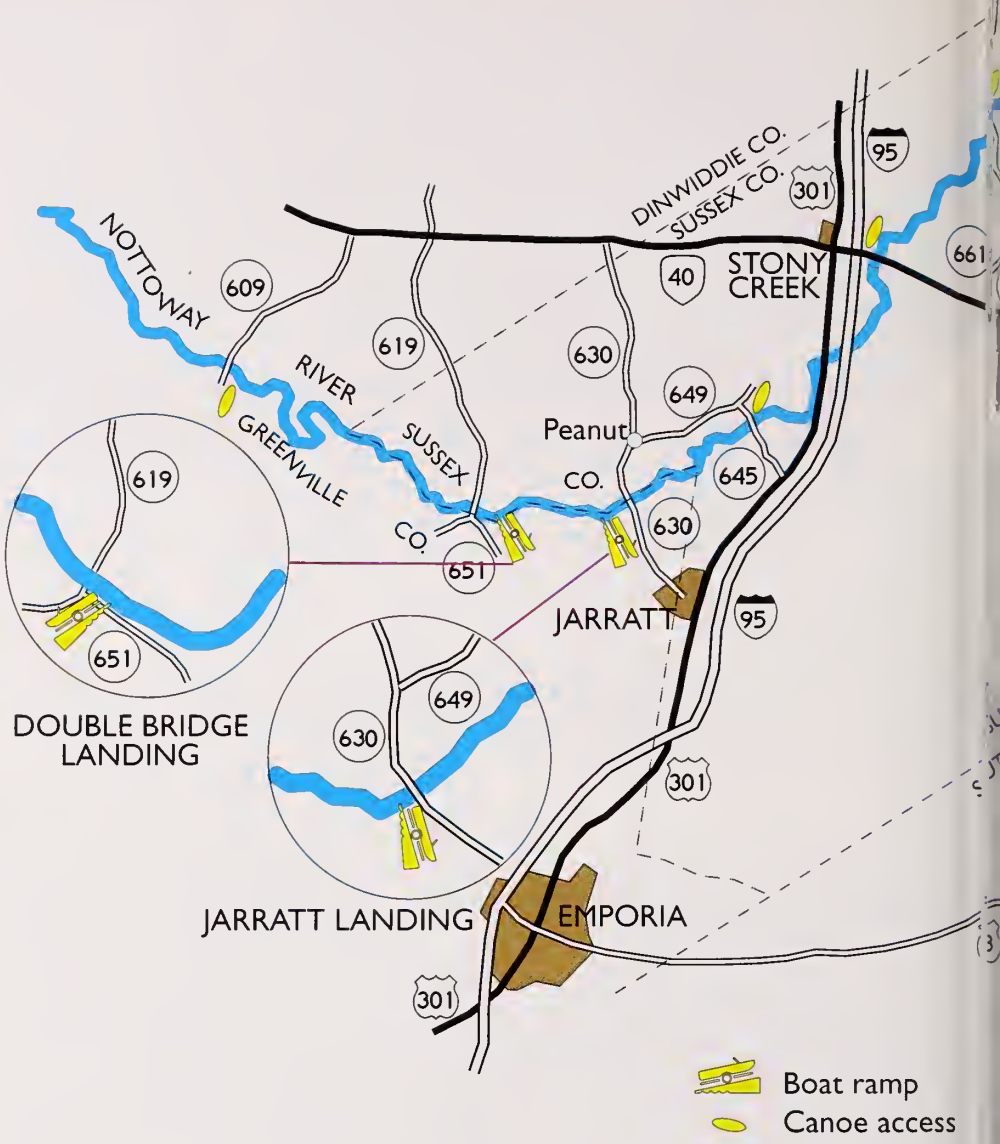
The fun part of fishing the Nottoway is you never know what you might catch. In one season of sampling fish and angling on the river, I saw 51 different species of fish. It's

not unusual to catch six or eight different species of fish on a given day on one lure. If you want to have some fun, switch lures and baits a couple of times and see how many species you can catch in a day. Every time I fished the river with someone, we ended up having a contest to see who could catch the most species, the most fish, and the biggest fish. The Nottoway is that kind of river. It's not really a place for trophy fish seekers or those wanting to bring home dinner, though you certainly could. It's the kind of place where a couple of fishing buddies can have a good time catching and releasing a wide variety of fish. The numbers aren't bad either. If the water's clear, you can shoot for catching a hundred fish in a day.

For anglers who don't have a boat or can't find a canoeing partner, there's always wading. The Nottoway can be a great river to wade and fish in the summer and fall. You might want to avoid wading in the spring, because spring flows are typically a little strong, and the river can get muddy after a good rain. In the summer and fall though, the river is typically low and clear. Head for one of the bridge crossing accesses along Rt. 40, or better yet, head up to the Rt. 619 ramp and jump in! On a hot July day, nothing beats standing waist deep in a cool, clean river, catching Roanoke bass and smallmouth bass on an ultra-light rod. If you go wading at the Rt. 619 ramp, don't worry if the water seems too cold when you step in. You're actually feeling the little spring creek that flows in next to the ramp, which is a lot colder than the river. Once you venture a few feet out into the river, the water's perfect.

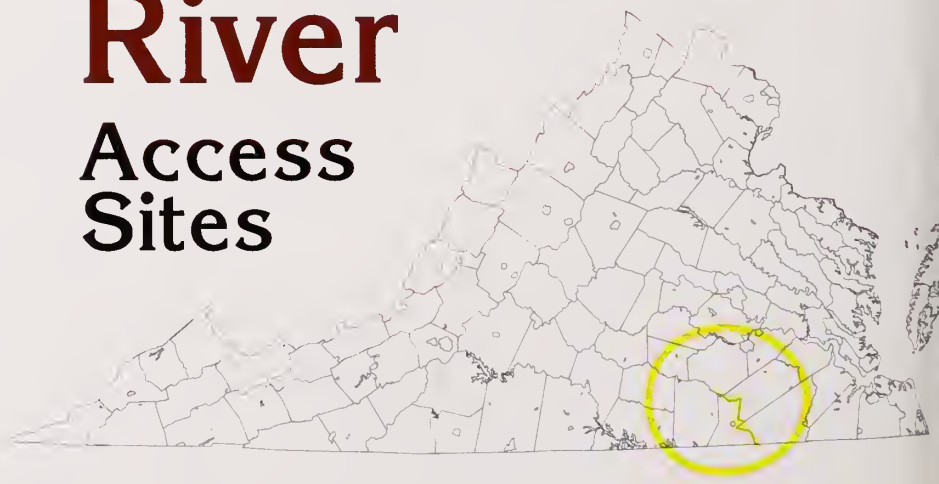
The Nottoway River is a four-season fishery. With its southeast location, the winter isn't too severe on the lower river, and anglers can catch some nice fish. Winter is a great time to fish the lower Nottoway River around Courtland for one pound and larger Roanoke bass. Find the deeper holes and fish on the bottom with small, live shiners. In recent years, a greater number of

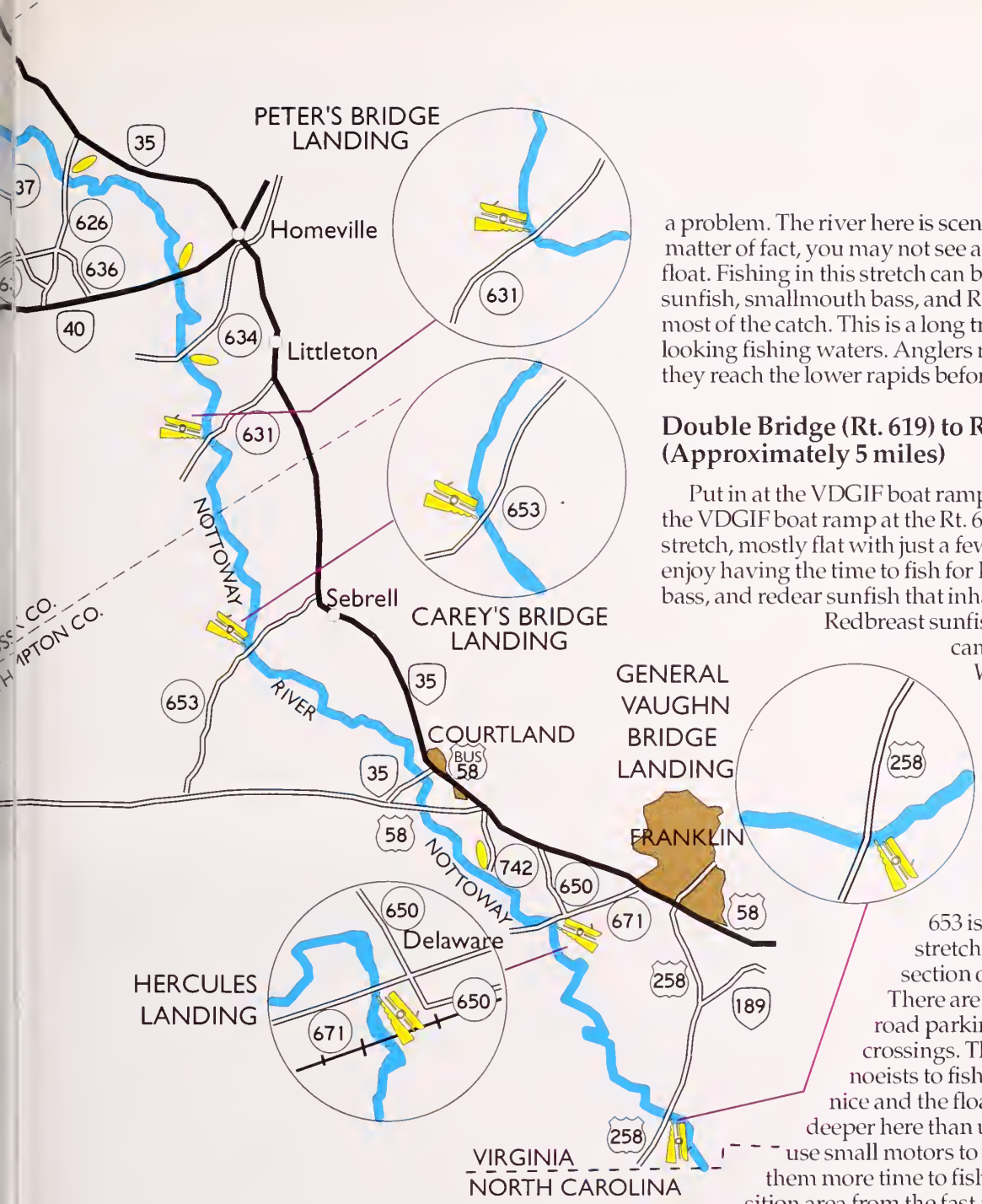
continued on page 20.



Nottoway River

Access Sites





a problem. The river here is scenic and undeveloped. As a matter of fact, you may not see another person during the float. Fishing in this stretch can be excellent with redbreast sunfish, smallmouth bass, and Roanoke bass providing most of the catch. This is a long trip with plenty of good-looking fishing waters. Anglers need to pace themselves so they reach the lower rapids before nightfall!

Double Bridge (Rt. 619) to Rt.630 Bridge (Approximately 5 miles)

Put in at the VDGIF boat ramp on Rt. 651, and take out at the VDGIF boat ramp at the Rt. 630 bridge. This is an easy stretch, mostly flat with just a few class I riffles. Anglers will enjoy having the time to fish for Roanoke bass, smallmouth bass, and redear sunfish that inhabit this section of the river. Redbreast sunfish are abundant here and can provide plenty of action. Walleye are caught here occasionally, typically in the late spring.

Peter's Bridge (Rt. 631) to Carey's Bridge (Rt. 653) (9 miles)

The trip from Rt. 631 to Rt. 653 is recommended in the lower stretch. If I had to pick my favorite section of river, this would be it. There are VDGIF boat ramps and off-road parking areas at these two bridge crossings. The float is a little long for canoeists to fish much, but the scenery is nice and the float is very easy. The river is deeper here than upstream, so anglers can use small motors to cut the float time, allowing them more time to fish the good spots. This transition area from the fast flowing waters upstream and the slow, swampy areas downstream provides anglers the chance to catch a little bit of everything. □

The following are three of the better float-fishing trips worth trying on the river:

Cutbank Bridge (Rt. 609) to Double Bridge (Rt. 619) (11.5 miles)

This is a trip for canoes only, as the river reaches the Fall Line in the last three miles of the trip. Put in at the Rt. 609 bridge and take out at the VDGIF boat ramp on Rt. 651, just past the Rt. 619 bridge. A few class I and II sections must be negotiated, but should not present much of

Nottoway River access sites:

County	Route number
Lunenburg	**49**
Dinwiddie	613, 612, 610, 609
Sussex	**619, 630**, 645, 40, 637, 626, 40, 634, **631**
Southampton	**653**, 742, **671**, 684, **258**

VDGIF ramp sites in bold, other routes have canoe access with limited parking.

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striped bass have been caught in the winter around the Rt. 258 bridge. To catch these angler favorites, use larger minnows, shad, and jigs.

In late February or early March, depending on water temperature, American shad, hickory shad, blueback herring, and alewife migrate upstream into the Nottoway on their annual spawning run. Southampton County is a good fishing spot early in the run, but most of the bigger American shad head upriver into Sussex County to spawn in the faster flowing water there. Peter's Bridge Landing (Rt. 631) is a good place to launch a boat and drift shad darts and small spoons for shad. White perch and yellow perch also run up the river in the spring and can provide some good angling. Hungry striped bass will follow the shad and herring schools upstream and add some excitement to a quiet day on the river. By late spring, largemouth bass and redear sunfish are active in the backwaters downstream of Courtland and are targeted by many anglers. The lower Nottoway River is an excellent location for one-pound plus size shellcrackers. Lily pad beds along the shore and in backwater sloughs hold some of the bigger fish.

The summertime offers good fishing throughout the river, but anglers will typically head either further upstream or further downstream depending on their preferred species. As the river gets warmer, many species will head upriver to find cooler, flowing water, while others seek out deep, quiet pools in the lower river. Around the Fall Line, waders and canoeists can cast small spinners and floating crankbaits to entice smallmouth bass, Roanoke bass, and redbreast sunfish. Downriver, where channel catfish are biting well, bluegill and bass fishing can still be good. Longnose gar school in the pools and can be caught easily on live minnows. Gar will also hit slow moving surface lures in the summer. Fishing in Sussex County is especially rewarding at this time of year because you can catch a little bit of everything.

In the fall, fish will be fairly well distributed throughout the river. Water levels can be low and fish will have found the deeper pools to hang out in. The lower river provides better action as the water cools and fish start moving down to their winter pools. Basically, Nottoway fishing works on a cycle. Start the year far downstream; follow the shad upriver in the spring; go further up for the summer; and then come back downstream as water temperatures fall again.

There is only one impoundment on the Nottoway, Fort Pickett Reservoir, at Fort Pickett Military Reservation in Brunswick County. The reservoir is 384 acres in size and has a good fishery. Largemouth bass, bluegill, black crappie, and channel catfish are the main species that anglers pursue here. A fishing permit ($20 annual) is required to fish on this military base. Anglers can find access to several miles of river on the base as well.

There are a half dozen paved ramps and about a dozen canoe access areas along the Nottoway, providing boaters and anglers with a wide variety of float trips. There are more access sites and more water in the lower river. The upper river is sandy and shallow, so it is more suited to wading than boating. The first public boat access on the river is at Nottoway Falls on Route 49, south of Crewe. Downstream is Fort Pickett Reservoir, with three boat ramps on it. Downstream of the military reservation, the river is deeper and rockier. Canoes can be launched at Rt. 613 and each bridge downriver (except I-85) in Dinwiddie County. In Greensville County and further downstream, there are more public ramps and parking areas for anglers and boaters to enjoy the river. Give the Nottoway a try and I'll bet it becomes one of your favorites too. The scenery is nice and the float is very easy. The river is deeper here than upstream, so anglers can use small motors to cut the float time, allowing them more time to fish the good spots. This transition area from the fast flowing waters upstream and the slow, swampy areas downstream provides anglers the chance to catch a little bit of everything. □

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VIRGINIA
Department of Game & Inland Fisheries

continued from page 16.

more information). And finally, tidal river fisheries are located on the base's eastern boundary. Excellent angling for striped bass and other fish from the Potomac River can be found in tidal Chopawamsic Creek.

Fort A.P. Hill

There are 14 impoundments at Fort A.P. Hill that are managed for public fishing. These are small, less than 70 acres and drain swampy bottoms, are infertile and tea-colored. Most have places to put in a small boat (no gas motors), although facilities for launching range from a concrete ramp to a firm bank. There are also many beaver ponds that may hold nice fish. Anglers seeking solitude in which to pursue their sport may enjoy exploring these ponds.

Bass and bluegill are the dominant species at Fort A.P. Hill and are popular with local anglers. Chain pickerel are also common. These predators hit hard, fight well, and grow to large size in some ponds. Occasionally, large crappies and shellcrackers may be caught. Recent biological surveys have captured trophy-size bass and pickerel. The state record flier was taken from a pond on Fort A.P. Hill.

In general, there are three groups of regulations. Bowies, Engineer, and Jordan Crossing Ponds have the following regulations, two bass per day, all 12 to15-inch bass must be released; five catfish per day; four chain pickerel per day; all grass carp must be released. All other lakes and ponds have the following change in regulations, two bass per day, 15-inch minimum. Three waters are only open part-time. Fish Hook Lake, is intensively stocked with channel catfish but is open intermittently. Buzzards Roost Pond, is open on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and holidays. Beaver Dam Pond is open Tuesdays, Sundays, and holidays. Special regulations are posted at these ponds. Fishing is permitted during daylight hours only.

Fishing permits are available from the Community Recreation Division and the Game Check Station. In general, the installation north of Route 301 is open to the public. Two ponds on the south side, Smoots Pond and Whites Lake, are accessible only at the dams, which are on the edge of military property. Those wishing to fish these two should contact Range Control to verify safe access. Rustic cabins are available for on-base accommodations and RV camping is allowed with the proper permits.

The Fort A.P Hill main gate is located on U.S. Route 301 about 2 miles north of Bowling Green. Ponds on the southern edge of the base are accessible via State Routes 640 and 618.

Fort Pickett

Fort Pickett, has 13 ponds managed for public fishing. Most are small impoundments, less than 60 acres, except for Fort Pickett Reservoir, which is 384 acres. Bluegill, bass, and crappie are the primary

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There are 14 impoundments at Fort A. P. Hill open to public fishing. Each is unique in its own way and offers people, young and old, an opportunity to enjoy some great fishing.

game species and are self-sustaining. Several managed ponds are stocked periodically with channel catfish. There is a five per day, 14-inch minimum length limit on bass. Butterwood and Floyd Ponds, have a limit of two bass per day, with a 20 inch minimum length. Fort Pickett Reservoir has a 12 to 16-inch slot limit, bass within these lengths must be released. Limits for other species follow Virginia state regulations.

All ponds have facilities for bank fishing and ramps for boats. A 35-hp motor restriction is in force, except on Fort Pickett Reservoir. Two lakes, Birchin and Tommeheton, are frequently closed due to military training.

The main access to Fort Pickett is from US Route 460. Take the Route 506 exit south for 1.5 miles to Military Rd. Follow this road through the main gate for 1.4 miles and make a left onto QM Circle West St. The Game Check Station is near the intersection with parking directly across the road. Fort Pickett Reservoir can be accessed from Route 46.

Tim Copeland is a graduate student at the Department of Fisheries & Wildlife at Virginia Tech doing fisheries research and management at Fort A.P. Hill.

For Additional Information

Fort A.P. Hill
Environmental Office,Building 1220
Directorate of Public Works
19952 North Range Rd
Fort A.P. Hill, VA 22427-3123
(804) 633-8255

Community Recreation Division,
Building 0106 (804) 633-8219

Game Check Station, Building 0163
(804) 633-8300

Range Control, Building 1253
(804) 633-8224

Fort Pickett
Game Check Station, Building 420
Blackstone, VA 23824
(804) 292-2618 or (804) 292-2101

Quantico U.S. Marine Corps Reservation
Commanding General
NREA Branch-B046
3250 Katlin Avenue
Quantico, VA 22134-5001
(703) 784-5810

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If you're interested in fishing Fort Pickett (above), Fort A. P. Hill, or Quantico please remember these are active military installations and there are certain rules that must be followed when visiting.

I'm Misty Over You

Can non-native horses and a fragil ecosystem co-exist on the small coastal island of Assateague?

by Thomas Brandt

Sitting on the dock of the Landmark Crab House restaurant, in Chincoteague, Virginia, with my daughter on my lap and a cold soda in my hand, the songwriter-son of Chincoteague, Randy Lee Ashcraft, strummed a melancholy piece on his guitar. It is a tale of his brother's life with his little daughter on this blue-collar barrier island.

"All he has to offer is the sweat upon his brow, so he's going to take good care of her the only way that he knows how. Going to give her all he's never had to keep her safe and warm—'cause there's a little girl depending on the muscle in his arm."

Maybe it was the sunset on the bay or the contrast with my life in Washington, but my own little Sara looked up at me blinking hard and said, "Daddy, you're getting too mushy."

An abundance of wildlife, a diverse ecosystem and the unusual Chincoteague horses, lure over a million people each year to visit Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on Assateague Island.

I had come with my family to roam the coastal wilderness of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge on Assateague Island, watching wildlife and hopefully getting a glimpse of the islands famous ponies. The next day before heading out Randy shared some insights into this island's culture, which helped me understand the unquiet controversy between Chincoteague's pony lovers and scientists who see the famous herd as an environmental threat.

From some 50 feet away a palomino pony stared down intently on Sara and me and, seeing nothing in my hands to mooch, she walked off through the salt marsh toward the sand dunes, with water spraying at each hoof step. A white cattle egret on her back rode quietly along since these semi-wild horses are a buffet table for bug-eating birds.

However this symbiotic relationship between the egrets and horses is the exception. While the ponies have an almost mystical draw on tourists who are now economically critical to the town of Chincoteague's survival, their trampling of ground nesting birds, the eating of plant life critical to barrier islands, soil compaction and other negative impacts of these non-native horses are of growing concern to scientists.

Here on one of the East Coast's wildest barrier islands some 150 feral horses run free, for decades drawing visitors from many surrounding states. In late July many thousands come for the annual "Pony Penning" festival where they bid to buy the captured colts. Since 1924 the "saltwater cowboys" of the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Department have saddled up their own horses, rounded up the island's scattered herds and swam them across the Assateague channel to the tiny town. Here the yearlings are sold to raise fire-fighting funds so Chincoteague will never again be

Over 300 varieties of migratory birds, like this cattle egret, can be found at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. Photo ©Dick Dickenson.

nearly lost to fire as it was in the early 1920s.

Besides being the inspiration for Marguerite Henry's 1947 children's book classic, *Misty of Chincoteague*, about two orphans drawn to a pony named Misty, the refuge is also a critically important major eastern flyway for birds. Some 1.4 million people are drawn here each year by the grazing ponies, the pristine beach, prolific bird watching, surf fishing, crabs and clamming.

But they often go away with much more, like a new appreciation of America's once-common wildfowl and the commitment of the National Park Service to protect this refuge. More than 300 varieties of migratory birds, from the rare great cormorant and white-breasted nuthatch, to the more common but elegant great blue heron, which grace these dunes and wetlands in various seasons of the year.

However, in recent years tension has grown. As the nation's wild habitat shrinks, biologists and environmentalists are increasingly concerned that the non-native horses at Chincoteague and several other East Coast barrier islands, such as Cumberland Island, Georgia and Cape Lookout, North Carolina, will further damage the land and threaten endangered birds and other species. The horses main food is marsh and dune grass, critical to the barrier islands' ecological stability.

"Anything that lives and breeds in the salt marsh will be damaged by foraging horses," said William Dunson, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Biology at Penn State University who has been visiting the refuge for many years. "You don't want non-native species to be present for you never know what their impact will be. If you wanted to bring horses out to this refuge for the first time, they would never allow it." Research is still underway as to what should be the environmentally acceptable horse population on this island refuge of some 10,000 acres.

A 1989 study of the refuge by Stam Zervanos and Ronald Keiper, from Penn State University, said, "Thus the frequency of grazing and grass production are in delicate balance...These are important factors when considering the carrying capacity and impact of grazing mammals on an ecosystem."

Lore has it that the horses came from two different sources some 300 years ago. The first horses perhaps came from Spanish galleons, wrecked off the coast, where they swam ashore from the sinking ships. Better documentation shows that Eastern Shore planters put the horses on the barrier island to both save the cost of building fences on their own land, and paying English taxes on the herd.

The horses are often called wild ponies, though neither term is accurate. They are neither native nor completely wild, and are thus feral horses, meaning they evolved from domesticated animals. And the term pony, while somewhat endearing, is used because these horses are small due to the strains of the saltwater habitat.

Those in the middle of the debate over how many horses are too many for the island include John Schroer, Refuge Manager. "When I first came here in '89, the firefighters were getting about $350 for each foal they sold. This year they sold nearly 90

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The annual "Pony Penning" festival has become a major tourist attraction for the area. Each year colts are rounded up and auctioned off to help raise money for the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Department. This year's event will be held Wednesday, July 28, through Thursday, the 29th.

©Bill Lane

and averaged more than $1,700 each," he said. One sold for $7,000. "If there was an effort to cut the herd size, there would be a tremendous outcry." The average price rose dramatically several years ago when, despite the centuries of mixed breeding, the Chincoteague horse became a registered breed.

As to the government established herd size of 150, Mr. Schroer said, "We can be fairly assured there's not a lot of environmental damage." Still, Chincoteague's topography is unique and, as Dr. Dunson said in reference to the horses' constant foraging, fauna trampling and soil compaction, quite vulnerable.

The refuge has wide beaches backed by low dunes, which yield to extensive saltmarshes. There are also large areas of pine and oak and freshwater ponds, and the park service maintains more than 2600 acres of shallow, freshwater moist soil to maximize the refuge's appeal to waterfowl. Some 15 miles of walking and biking trails weave through the island where visitors can photograph in an hour more bird varieties than they will ever see in the suburbs.

In the town of Chincoteague, which you must pass through to reach the refuge across the Assateague channel bridge, and where most visitors stay in modest motels, the controversy is not about the environment but supporting your family. This little seaside village once thrived on commercial fishing, but as that trade seriously declined the ponies began drawing more and more tourists. The *Misty of Chincoteague* book, and the film version in 1961, which still warm hearts, breathed new economic life into the town and a protection from poverty. Now the homespun restaurants that once served 5 a.m. breakfasts to the fishermen have tourist vans in their parking lots and walls laden with pony pictures.

Still, Chincoteague remains more a village than a resort. To sense this society, listen to another of Randy Lee Ashcraft's signature pieces, "Pony Penning Time." This sad, slow song tells of the father-to-son tradition of the saltwater cowboys, those who have passed away over the years, and the pony heart of Chincoteague. With a penny whistle haunting the background, the chorus goes, "Empty out the crab pots, hang the nets to dry, cause the pony swim is coming at the slacking of the tide."

Here you forget about rubber stamp subdivisions and resort sprawl. Chincoteague is a blend of ponies, crabs, decoy carvers, wildfowl and families, with an ocean running through it. While a case can be made for shrinking the horse herd below 150, elimination would be tantamount to burning down the town of many families.

So the answer is an unprecedented deal between the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Department and the Fish and Wildlife Service. A special use permit allows the VFD to maintain a herd of 150 horses on the federal refuge under certain conditions. These include a twice a year horse round up by the VFD to allow for veterinarian examinations and vaccinations, which are also paid for by the VFD.

Also fencing weaves through the woods now to keep the horses off the beaches and dunes so no damage is done to the plant life that stabilizes these oceanfront areas. Fencing also keeps the horses from the roads, though one or two are hit by cars nearly every year. This also limits the biting and kicking of tourists who mistakenly think that the horses are tame.

The refuge director, Mr. Shroer adds, "We look at visitation as a challenge. How can we let that many people in, 1.4 million a year, and keep it a refuge? Still, it is a great opportunity to educate people, and many leave here as great new advocates for wildlife." He points out the reality that nearly 80 percent of the local economy now depends on refuge visitations.

Back on the dock that night, the last lines of a Randy Lee Ashcraft song summarizes the pony vision of the local folks. "We have not come to take you, but to celebrate your life. Here on Chincoteague Island, it's pony penning time." □

Tom Brandt is a freelance writer who lives Northern Virginia.

If you are looking for a truly unique outdoor experience and wonder what life might have been like 50 years ago in a small coastal community then plan a trip to the town of Chincoteague and the National Wildlife Refuge.

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Journal

Anglers Reel in State Records

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) announced that two more state record catches have been confirmed, bringing the number of state record fish caught to a total of four in a two-month period. According to VDGIF Director Bill Woodfin, "An average of three records are broken each year. To set four new records in a two-month period is tremendous. The size of these fish is a testament to the Department's management and hatchery programs." The recently confirmed records were for striped bass and blue catfish. Said Fisheries Division Chief Gary Martel, "The striped bass record comes at a time when our biologists are working with the Smith Mountain Striper Club on a cooperative program to enhance striped bass fishing in the lake. As for the record catfish, the popularity of catfish fishing is growing rapidly, particularly in Virginia's eastern tidal rivers where catfish are increasing in both size and numbers." Chairman of the State Record Fish Committee Ed Steinkoenig remarked, "We haven't had this much activity since the program was overhauled in 1985. Under the new rules there was a flurry of records but they have leveled off since 1987." The 1985 rules set minimum qualifying weights for most species.

The striped bass record now belongs to Robert Burgess of Stokesdale, North Carolina. His fish weighed 49 pounds, 4 ounces, measured 46.25 inches in length, and had a girth of 31 inches. Burgess caught the fish on April 10, while fishing Smith Mountain Lake. The new record replaces the previous record of 45 pounds, 10 ounces caught by Michael Rogers at Smith Mountain Lake on February 18, 1995. The blue catfish record now belongs to David Christian of Powhatan, Virginia. His fish weighed 67 pounds, 8 ounces, measured 48.25 inches in length, and had a girth of 34.75 inches. Christian caught the fish on April 11, while fishing the James River. The new record replaces the previous record of 66 pounds, 8 ounces caught by Larry Clarkson in the Appomattox River on June 24, 1994.

Game wardens David Cushman (left) and Carson Altizer (right), who regularly patrol Smith Mountain Lake, were on hand to help record Robert Burgess' (center) new state record striped bass, which weighed in at 49 pounds, 4 ounces.

The two earlier records this year were for walleye and yellow perch. Gregory Murphy caught the record walleye on February 27, while fishing the New River. The fish weighed 15 pounds, 3 ounces, measured 33.5 inches in length and had a girth of 20.5 inches. The previous record walleye was 14 pounds, 6 ounces caught by Robert C. Aker also on the New River. Tim Austin caught the record yellow perch on March 20, while fishing at Lake Moomaw. The fish weighed 2 pounds, 7 ounces, measured 16 inches in length, and had a girth of 12 inches. The new record replaces a 2 pound, 3 ounce fish caught by Donald Crouse, Jr. also at Lake Moomaw.

For information about Department of Game and Inland Fisheries fish management and hatchery programs visit the Department's Web site at www.dgif.state.va.us. □

Remember: Register in 1999 With Virginia's Harvest Information Program (HIP)

In 1998 Virginia migratory game bird hunters began participation in the nationwide Harvest Information

Program (HIP). This program is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and all states in the country to annually obtain a nationwide sample frame of migratory game bird hunters from which representative samples of hunters will be selected and asked to participate in voluntary harvest surveys during the hunting seasons.

All migratory game bird hunters are reminded that registration in HIP is required each year and will begin on July 1, for the 1999 season. To register, migratory game bird hunters will again call the toll free number 1-800-WETLAND (938-5263). Another option the Department plans to offer this year is registering over the Internet via the Department's Web page. This is still in the development stage and more information will be available later on how to register "online."

Last hunting season 46,525 migratory game bird hunters registered with the Virginia Harvest Information Program. Of the total, 28,093 hunters identified themselves as dove hunters, 11,682 as duck hunters, 1,226 as sea duck hunters, 7,078 as goose hunters, 6,786 as brant hunters, 2,091 as woodcock hunters, 724 as rail hunters and 689 as snipe hunters. Although these numbers may be below expectations, the Department is pleased with the cooperation and response of Virginia migratory game bird hunters who registered during the first year of the program. The number of registered hunters is anticipated to increase in 1999 as more migratory game bird hunters become aware of the mandatory program. Participation in this program is not an option and hunters should realize that their participation in HIP will benefit the future of their migratory game bird hunting in Virginia.

Beginning on July 1, hunters **after** obtaining their 1999 hunting license may call the 1-800 number any time day or night. Once they have completed the registration process they will receive a unique 10-digit HIP number to put on their hunting license. There is a line provided on the license for the HIP registration number. Non-resident hunters hunting migratory game birds in Virginia are also required to register after purchasing their license.

Hunters who are exempt from purchasing a license (because of age, lifetime license holders or landowners that hunt on their own land) are still required to register with HIP. Once they receive their HIP number they should record it on a piece of paper and carry it on their person while hunting.

The HIP number is the hunter's proof that they registered with Virginia's program and must be available for inspection by law enforcement officials (state and federal).

The data compiled from HIP will help biologists more accurately establish proper hunting season frameworks, bag limits and population management programs for migratory game birds. One of the benefits the Department receives from the program is the ability to survey selected groups of hunters, like the survey of dove hunters conducted this past year, to find out what specific concerns and desires they might have regarding the species they hunt. Future surveys will target waterfowl, woodcock and rails. The results of these surveys will provide Department staff with a better idea of hunter opinion before making season and bag limit recommendations to the Board at the July and August migratory game bird season setting meetings. ☐

Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show Comes to Town

Looking for a great way to get in the mood for hunting season, then stop by the Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show, August 13-15 at the Show Place on Mechanicsville Tnpk. in Richmond. This is your chance to meet with Department wildlife biologists, game wardens and a host of trained professionals to answer all your questions. The Department will also be handing out information on hunting, fishing and wildlife watching along with assisting in the scoring of deer mounts and judging the Virginia Gobbler Classic.

The Outdoor Sportsman's Show is the largest of its kind in the state and is devoted to promoting hunting as a fun and safe sport. For 16 years the show has been attracting people from all over the state with educational seminars and a chance to view the latest in outdoor products. "It's a great place to bring the whole family and learn more about hunting and the outdoors in Virginia," says Denny Quaiff, executive director of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association.

So, if you're into bows, traditional black powder or looking for a great pair of binoculars to watch wildlife with then this is the place to be. For more information call (804) 748-7529 or visit their web site at www.sportsmanshow.com ☐

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North Fork of the Holston River

In the March issue of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine, in the article "Float Fishing the North Fork of the Holston", it was stated that the ban on taking fish for human consumption due to mercury problems in the river had been lifted and replaced with an advisory. That information was incorrect. The ban on taking fish for human consumption is still in effect. ☐

On The Water

by Jim Crosby, Boating Education Coordinator

Charting a Course

The first secret of having a great boating adventure is to know your area before you go. Doing your homework on the beach before you get underway can ensure pleasure displaces mishap.

Interrupting your fun to set off in search of food, fuel and/or rest room facilities can take you down the river to wrong turns, dead end feeder streams and endless miles of waterway devoid of needed facilities. A hapless skipper without a chart can earn the wrath of his crew and guests in the snap of an empty gas tank, hunger pangs, or urgent calls of nature.

In addition to picking the date, time, place, inviting the guests and listing the items to be placed on board; part of the planning for a waterborne recreational outing should include obtaining and studying a chart of the area in which you expect to navigate.

Great adventures await the recreational boater on Virginia waters—all of which are covered by maps and/or charts. Maps are generally used to guide motorists and hikers, and feature roads and paths on dry land. Mariners should consult marine charts because they feature the kind of information one needs to successfully navigate afloat. Where maps usually contain route numbers and mileage indicators between points of interest; charts contain vital information for the boater like: water depth, bottom configuration and aids to navigation (ATONS) such as channel markers, informational buoys, and danger warnings. Like our highways, our waterways contain signs useful to the boater in telling where you are, where you are going and numbered buoys even count your progress up or down stream.

Studying a chart of your operational area can prepare you for a fun and safe water borne adventure. When needs arise, you will know exactly in which direction to point your craft to find the services and/or facilities you require. Planning your cruise to include rest and refueling stops can eliminate a lot of worry and frustration, and make you a hero with your passengers.

©Dwight Dyke

Not only should you study the chart ahead of time for familiarization and planning purposes, you should by all means take it with you. Have you heard that statement, "The best laid plans often go awry." Only with a chart onboard can the skipper cope with unforeseen changes in the plan.

I remember an outing on the upper James River at Dutch Gap. We had just launched from the Osborne Landing launch ramps at the intersection of Kingsland Road and the Osborne Turnpike, just south of Richmond. With a boatload of guests onboard, we were cruising downstream when out of the clear blue sky came an impromptu and most violent thunderstorm, offering heavy rain and high wind. A 180-degree turn and short dog leg up the river around Hatcher Island brought us under the shelter of a slip at the Richmond Yacht Club where we rode out the storm in protected comfort. It was only my knowledge of the operating area that saved my guests a good drenching and they were very appreciative.

Commercial launch ramps and marinas almost always have charts of the local waters. Make them as necessary a boating tool as the keys to your floating chariot and never leave home without the right one because it could save your day, and maybe your life. □

July Afield

by Jack Randolph

July 1 is a magic date for hunters. It is the first day of the new license year, which means the 1999-2000 hunting licenses are on sale. It is also the first day for the sale of waterfowl blind licenses to riparian landowners.

July holds other interests for hunters. This is the month the Board of the Game Department meets to set the hunting seasons for webless migratory game birds, such as doves, rails and woodcocks. In recent years July has also become the month when the season for hunting resident Canada geese is announced. Finally, it is this month when we hear how well the waterfowl have fared on their northern nesting grounds, giving us the first hint of what to expect when the ducks and geese commence to migrate.

The seventh month of the year is not thought of as a month for catching big largemouth bass, but it has its surprises. A 12-pounder was caught out of Briery Creek Lake last July. There was also a week in mid-July last year when the bass went hog wild in Chickahominy Lake. There were 15 limit catches reported in one day at Ed Allen's and two anglers caught and released 42 bass in a single day!

If you like to fish at night July is a good month to do it. Last July, night fishermen did very well fishing for walleyes on Lake Chesdin. Fishing at night is also a good way to avoid the heavy boat traffic that is typical of hot summer days.

By mid-July the big blue catfish of the tidal rivers should be done spawning and returning to action. Of course, July is a fine month to wave fly rods at bream in the ponds and lakes.

Speaking of fly rods, the long rods are more and more becoming the weapons of choice among anglers who fish the Commonwealth's excellent smallmouth bass rivers. And July is a good time to do it with all of the river fish; smallmouth, rock bass and sunfish, on the prowl.

On Buggs Island Lake, when the landlocked striped bass return from their successful spawning runs up the Dan and Staunton rivers they generally swim the entire length of the lake, all the way to Kerr Dam, before turning around and spreading through the lake. Night fishing with topwater lures is often a good way to catch landlocked stripers from the lower lake in July.

©Dwight Dyke

Deep trolling with Sutton spoons and other deep running lures will catch stripers and other surprises at Smith Mountain Lake. Last July a musky weighing 32 pounds, 10 ounces grabbed a Sutton spoon and provided a measure of excitement.

July is a fine month to fish in Virginia's marine waters. By this month just about all of the fish that visit Virginia during the summer have arrived. Depending upon how the Federal regulations sort out, July has earned a reputation for catching bluefin tuna by a method called "chunking."

Last July was a sensational month for flounders and, despite an increased size limit, this month could be just as good. In one week last July 102 citation flounders weighing six pounds or more were caught. This year, however, the last week of July is closed to flounder fishing.

This year has started out as one of the best years for catching croakers in recent memory. They are not only more plentiful, they are much larger. July is a good month for catching them and they should be available from the piers, in the tidal rivers and throughout the bay. In addition to the croakers, some large gray trout have appeared at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and those hot July nights should be perfect for catching a limit of tiderunners.

One of the more spectacular visitors that arrive here in July is the tarpon. They generally appear along the lower Eastern Shore where anglers fish for them with rigged spot and other live baits. Only a half dozen or so are caught each year and there is an unwritten code among sportsmen that all tarpon caught are released alive.

Add to this list of great fish black and red drum and cobia and you pretty much have the July cast of characters in the bay. Offshore, by July the blue and white marlin have arrived along with dolphin, yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, amberjack and possibly a sailfish or two.

Whether your game is spectacular marlin in the blue water or a feisty bream in a quiet pond, it is all fishing and each offers unique rewards that let us return to our regular chores mentally rested and ready to take on whatever comes. □

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

How Low Can You Go?

The eyes always looked soooo mean. I got down as low as I dared and still felt very insecure behind my CANON 300 f2.8 lens. I watched as a thin tongue tested the air, slipped out from scaly lips and waved silent yet slow in the morning air. I kept taking an eye away from the viewfinder and looking at my subject. Yes, he was still far enough away...hadn't moved. It was just a little disconcerting to look back into the viewfinder and see that angular head a lot closer than I felt comfortable with.

I'm not very comfortable photographing snakes, especially on their level, but my reaction to seeing the snake eye to eye made me want to take pictures even more. It was much more dramatic staring into the face of a copperhead or rattlesnake than looking down on the top of his head! You might be surprised! And you might not. Photographing any creature at eye level will give you a very personal and intimate look into it's life; you see the world from its perspective.

Being on the same level as your subject also makes you appear less of a threat when approaching them. Instead of towering above looking tall and menacing, try squatting down into a ball or reclining on the grass. Your low profile can make you a curiosity and I've actually had animals come up to me because they couldn't figure out what I was.

This was first proven to me on a trip to the Okavango Delta, in Botswana. Touring around Chobe National Park my guide, June Anthony, asked if I wanted to get close up shots of a bull elephant. "Sure," I whispered as we watched one particularly handsome fellow drink from a waterhole. As the big male turned to tend to duties elsewhere June climbed out of the rover and told me to follow. Squatting down on all fours she motioned me to do the same. I was a bit skeptical until we were within 10 to 15 feet of the suddenly HUGE creature. As he saw us he turned, stepped forward and shook his mighty head catapulting a shower of dust in every direction. Wiping my wide eyes, I glanced at June, just a little curious at her response to the greeting. As if reading my mind she leaned over and whispered that I should remain low to the ground. And no matter what happens...don't run or you're dead meat! She continued by saying that she felt that the elephant was actually confused by our low profile. In fact, she noted, he probably thought we were just "cheeky" warthogs

The next time you venture out to photograph wild creatures, think about getting down on their level for a change. Discover how low you can go.

Relaxing in a leaf pile, this handsome copperhead posed quietly, unthreatened by my presence. He was shot with a CANON T-90 camera and a 300mm f2.8 lens with a life size adapter which allows the lens to focus closer than normal. ©Lynda Richardson.

News You Can Use:

Are you out there "Photographing Virginia's Fabulous Fauna?" I sure hope so! The weather is beautiful, the flowers are blooming and critters are having babies. Don't forget to enter you fabulous shots in this year's "Photo Tips" contest! If you aren't aware of the contest check it out in the March issue of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine. Plan now...the deadline for entries is October 22, 1999.

Do you have a special place where you like to photograph wildlife or wildflowers? Would you be willing to share such a spot? I'm looking for the best locations in Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, Delaware and Tennessee to photograph critters and flowering plants. I'm hoping to put this information together in a book and possibly a series of "Photo Tips" columns, in turn sharing what I learned with fellow photographers. If you know of a productive place to photograph anything from fox to firepinks, please write to me at Lynda Richardson, P.O. Box 8296, Richmond, VA 23226 or my e-mail address: lr@lyndarichardson. I look forward in hearing from you! □

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

Catfish—Fun to Catch and Cook

Today Virginia offers many species of catfish, large and small. They provide a different type of challenge than bass or trout. While catfish angling has developed into a specialty, all catches have something in common—their excellent flavor.

The easiest way to skin catfish is to fillet them and then skin the fillets. This results in portions suitable for many cooking methods such as poaching, frying, baking and broiling.

Menu

Marinated Mushrooms
Orange Poached Catfish
Succotash
Broiled Tomatoes
Peach Crisp

©M.L. Giovannetti

Marinated Mushrooms

1 bottle (8 ounces) Italian salad dressing
1 pound mushrooms
Grated peel of ½ lemon
Juice of 1 lemon
2 tablespoon chopped parsley

In medium saucepan, combine Italian dressing and mushrooms and bring to boil. Cook uncovered 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add lemon peel and juice. Chill 4 hours or more. Drain; reserve dressing. Stir in parsley. Serve as an appetizer with toothpicks. Makes about 2 cups.

Note: Reserved dressing may be used on salads.

Orange Poached Catfish

1 ¼ pounds catfish fillets
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 tablespoons diced red onion
Salt and pepper to taste
¼ cup fresh orange juice
¼ teaspoon grated orange zest
¼ teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed

In large skillet, heat oil over medium heat and cook onion for 5 minutes, until soft but not brown. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and add orange juice, orange zest and rosemary. Stir and cook for 1 minute. Add catfish. Lower heat to medium-low. Cover tightly and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until fish is opaque. Remove catfish to serving plate and spoon sauce from skillet over fillets. Serves 4.

Succotash

2 cups fresh shelled baby lima beans
3 cups fresh corn kernels (6 ears)
3 bacon slices
1 medium onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, pressed
Salt and pepper to taste

Cook lima beans in boiling water to cover for 15 minutes. Add corn and return to a boil. Cook 10 minutes or until lima beans are tender; drain. Cook bacon in skillet until crisp. Remove bacon and reserve 2 tablespoons drippings. Crumble bacon. Saute onion and garlic in hot drippings until tender. Stir in bean mixture, salt and pepper. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, 5 minutes. Top with bacon. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Broiled Tomatoes

4 firm, ripe tomatoes
¼ cup dried bread crumbs
2 tablespoons light brown sugar
¼ cup butter or margarine, softened
½ teaspoon dried parsley
¼ teaspoon dried dill
Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350° F. Wash and stem tomatoes; halve horizontally and arrange skin-side down in a single layer in a greased baking pan. In a small bowl, mix crumbs, sugar, butter, parsley, dill, salt and pepper. Sprinkle over tomatoes. Bake in preheated oven until bubbly, 15 to 20 minutes Just before serving, run under broiler for 1 minute. Makes 8 servings.

Peach Crisp

6 cups peeled, sliced peaches
Sugar to taste
⅓ cup flour
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
¼ teaspoon cinnamon
1 cup rolled oats (not instant)
½ cup brown sugar
4 tablespoons (½ stick) melted butter or margarine

Toss peaches with sugar to taste and spread evenly in an 8 x 8-inch pan. Combine flour, nutmeg, cinnamon, oats, brown sugar and melted butter and spread mixture over peaches. Bake in a 375° F. oven for 30 minutes or until browned. Serve warm with cream or ice cream. Makes 6 servings. □

Naturally Wild

by Spike Knuth

The Brown Thrasher

The brown thrasher is one of the mimic thrushes—a family that includes the mockingbird and the catbird. Thanks to its long tail and long curved bill, it measures nearly a foot long. Its color above is a reddish-brown, with creamy white underparts, which are streaked with brown.

Its calls are similar to the mockingbird, however it only repeats varied notes, not a triple repetition like the mockingbird, and it isn't the mimic the mockingbird is. It's not the flashy flier that the mockingbird is either. When flying, its tail is held somewhat stiffly, straight out behind it, while the mockingbird flashes and twists its tail.

The thrasher builds a good-sized nest of twigs, leaves, stems and even paper. It then lays 4 or 5 eggs that are pale blue and finely spotted with brown. It normally has two broods. Brown thrashers like upland thickets, woodland edges, or old fields with scattered brushy shrubs and small, bushy trees. Around the city or in suburbia, brown thrashers gravitate to dense shrubs, especially thorny ones like pyracantha or barberry, but also holly, chokecherry, bush honeysuckle, photinia or forsythia—any dense hedges.

Thrashers usually feed close to or on the ground in leaf mulch or humus. They dig with their long bill or scratch with their feet for insects, grubs and worms. In late fall and winter they turn to wild fruits, seeds even small acorns, and if the weather doesn't get too harsh, a few actually stay with us through the winter in protected places. □

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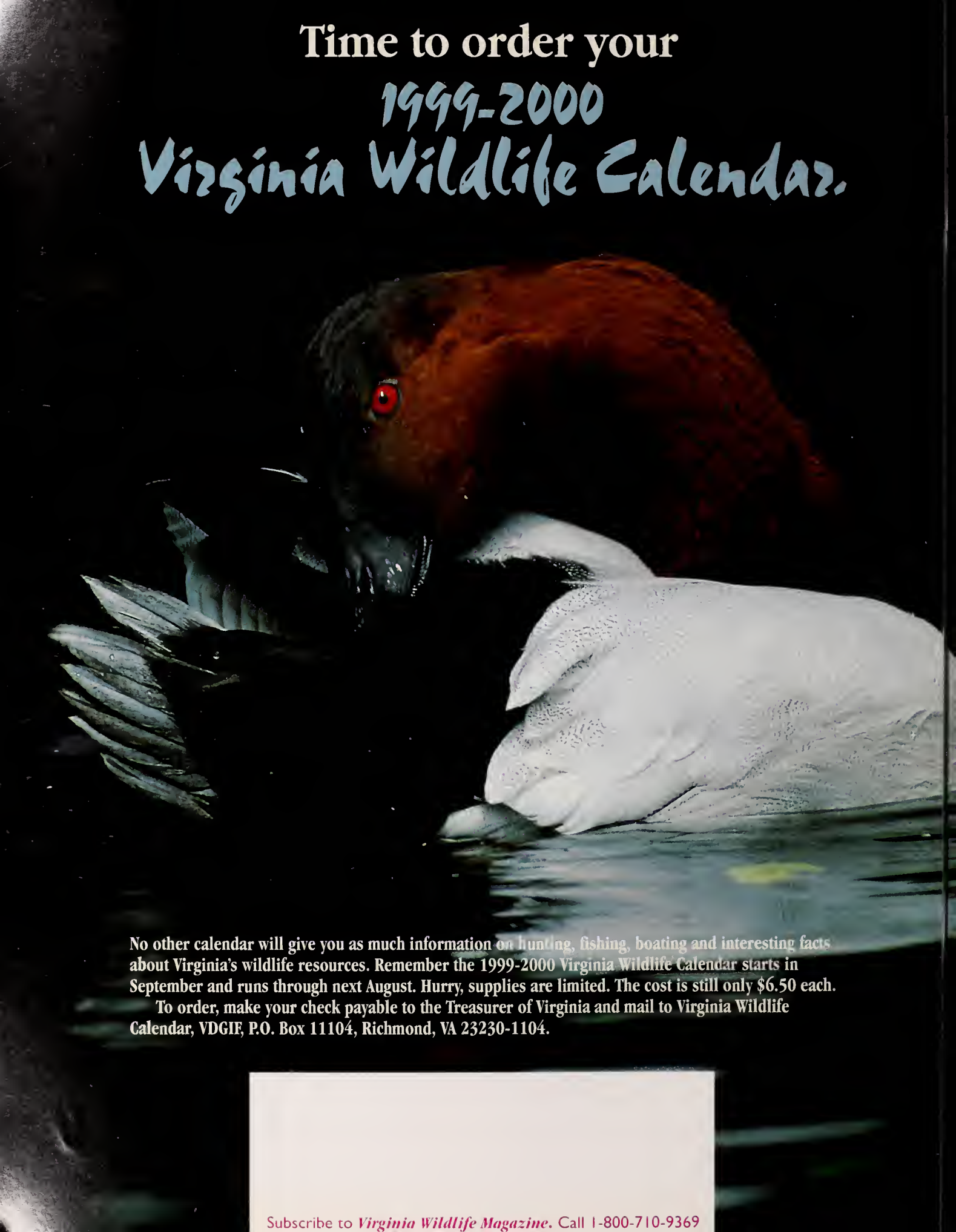
1999-2000 Virginia Wildlife Calendar.



No other calendar will give you as much information on hunting, fishing, boating and interesting facts about Virginia's wildlife resources. Remember the 1999-2000 Virginia Wildlife Calendar starts in September and runs through next August. Hurry, supplies are limited. The cost is still only $6.50 each.

To order, make your check payable to the Treasurer of Virginia and mail to Virginia Wildlife Calendar, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

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